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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: MAY 11, 2009

Summary: The security forces' claim of killing 200 militants in Swat and Shangla districts dominated headlines in all newspapers on Monday. Also highlighted, was a report stating that "tens of thousands of people streamed out of conflict zone." Several major dailies underlined President Zardari's statement "strongly rejecting" the notion that Pakistan might collapse, and "calling" for international efforts to fight Islamic extremism. CENTCOM Chief General Petraeus' remarks that the "growing Taliban insurgency in Pakistan has galvanized the nuclear armed country to fight an 'existential threat'" received extensive coverage. Reports of a fierce clash in restive Mohmand Agency killing 26 militants were also highlighted.

Most major dailies ran editorials on various aspects of the current military onslaught against the Taliban, and its far-reaching consequences including a massive displacement of local people. The center-right national English daily "The Nation," advised that "while tackling the growing insurgency, the government need not to lose the focus of taking appropriate measures for the rehabilitation of the millions of internally displaced persons that has turned out to be a serious humanitarian crisis." The center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan," observed that "in order to manage the refugee situation, all political and religious parties and the civil society need to show the same spirit they did in the wake of the 2005 earthquake." The Peshawar-based English daily "The Frontier Post," observed that the exodus "would eventually turn into the worst-ever humanitarian calamity in our annals too if existing faltering relief action is not revamped and pepped up forthwith." End Summary.

News Stories

"180 Perish In Operation; Swat, Shangla Militants Bear The Brunt"
"The News" (05/11)

"Security forces on Sunday claimed to have killed 180-200 militants in Swat and Shangla districts during the last 24 hours, while five militants were killed in the Maidan area of Dir Lower. Also, three civilians were killed in strafing by gunship helicopters and a paramilitary soldier was shot dead by militants in Malakand Agency, the ISPR said."

"Panicked People Leave Swat, Dir And Malakand During Curfew Break; 100,000 Stream Out Of Conflict Zone" "Dawn" "(05/11)

"Tens of thousands of people streamed out of Swat, Dir and Malakand districts during a relaxation in curfew on Sunday morning...."

Taliban still control Mingora with armed groups patrolling the streets and holding positions on rooftops. Militants entered houses vacated by local people and turned them into bunkers.... 'My information is that more than 100,000 people managed to leave Swat during the curfew break on Sunday,' said Forestry Minister Wajid Ali, who is a lawmaker from Mingora."

"Zardari Laughs Off Country's Collapse Notion" "The News" (05/11)

"President Asif Ali Zardari, in an interview aired on Sunday, strongly rejected the notion that Pakistan might collapse and called for international efforts to fight extremism. "Is the state of Pakistan going to collapse?" Zardari asked himself rhetorically on NBC's 'Meet the Press' program. 'No. We are 180 million people. There the population is much, much more than the insurgents are.'"

"U.S. Aid With Conditions Opposed; Pakistan Not Adding To Its Nuclear Arsenal: Zardari" "Dawn" "(05/11)

"President Asif Ali Zardari has said that Pakistan is not adding to its nuclear arsenal and doesn't have to inform the United States about location of its weapons, he said in NBC's 'Meet the Press' program on Sunday.... President Zardari said that U.S. assistance shouldn't come with conditions."

"Pakistan 'Galvanized' To Fight Taliban: Petraeus" "The Nation" (05/11)

"U.S. regional commander General David Petraeus on Sunday expressed confidence that Pakistan's nuclear sites are secure from any attempted seizure by the Taliban. 'We have confidence in their security procedures,' the Chief of U.S. Central Command told the 'Fox News Sunday' program when asked about Pakistan's nuclear safeguards as the Taliban make deep inroads. The growing Taliban insurgency in Pakistan has galvanized the nuclear-armed country to fight an 'existential threat,' the top U.S. Commander for the Afghan-Pakistan war theatre said."

"26 Taliban Killed In Mohmand Clash" "Dawn" "(05/11)

"In a fierce gun-battle in Ambar valley of Mohmand region on Sunday, security forces killed 26 Taliban militants and injured 12, a press release of the Frontier Corps said in Peshawar."

"Parliamentary Approval For Operation In Swat Likely" "Dawn" "(05/11)

"As the National Assembly begins a special session on Monday, the government seems set to win the first parliamentary approval for a renewed war against barbaric rebels in the country's northwest after the failure of a controversial peace deal."

"Plea For People's Support" "Dawn" "(05/11)

"The military is making a passionate and fervent appeal to the brave and patriotic citizens of Swat that they should stand up and declare a war against the miscreants who have undermined peace and stability of the scenic valley, says a press release issued by the Swat Media Centre."

"Taliban Cannot Overrun Pakistan, Says Haqqani" "The News" (05/11)

"Pakistan's ambassador to the United States Husain Haqqani has said the Taliban are limited geographically and do not have the ability to overrun the state. He told the American viewers in an interview with the CNN that economic development and bolstering Islamabad's counter-insurgency capability could effectively stem the Talibanization. The envoy called for understanding the Taliban challenges in the right perspective."

"Absence Of NGOs Being Felt In Relief Work" "The News" (05/11)

"Though thousands of kind-hearted individuals and families have extended support to the violence-affected people of Malakand, yet the absence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the relief operation has been greatly felt."

"Serious Housing Shortage In Mardan For IDPs" "The News" (05/11)

"With a huge influx of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) owing to military operation in Malakand and Buner, the district Mardan now lacks buildings for accommodation. An NGO activist, identified as Siraj Muhammad of Takhtbhai tehsil, told 'The News.'"

"Sufi Accuses Govt. Of Violating Peace Accord" "The News" (05/11)

"Tehrik Nifaz Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) chief Maulana Sufi Muhammad on Sunday alleged that the government had twice violated the Swat peace agreement by launching the military operation and displacing thousands of innocent people in the Malakand division. In a statement issued here, he said that they had no ill-intention but wanted the implementation of Shariah in the Malakand division in toto."

"No Contact With Sufi Since Operation Began" "Daily Times" (05/11)

"The Awami National Party (ANP) on Sunday said it had temporarily stopped communicating with Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi (TNSM) chief Sufi Muhammad until the military concludes its operation against the Taliban, ANP Information Secretary Zahid Khan told 'Daily Times.'"

"JI Amir Predicts 'Big Jihad' Against U.S." "Dawn" (05/11)

"Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) Amir Syed Munawwar Hasan has predicted armed struggle against United States in the days to come, while speaking at a 'Go-America-Go' rally in Lahore on Sunday. Fearing that the United States would soon announce invasion of Pakistan on the excuse that Pak Army had failed to eliminate terrorists' bases in the country, Munawwar urged the people to step up their efforts to safeguarding solidarity and nuclear program of the country and pushing the Americans back into Afghanistan."

"Qureshi Announces Creation Of Pak-American Foundation" "Dawn" (05/11)

"Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi announced in Washington on Saturday the creation of a first ever umbrella organisation of the Pakistani diaspora, the Pak-American Foundation. Representatives of some 90 political, social, cultural and economic organizations and human rights activists attended a meeting which was chaired by Mr. Qureshi and attended by U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Anne Patterson, Pakistan's UN Ambassador Husain Haroon and Ambassador to the U.S. Husain Haqqani."

"Pak-U.S. Naval Exercise" "Pakistan Observer" (05/11)

"The U.S. and Pakistani Naval forces are conducting bilateral exercise code named 'INSPIRED UNION' and 'INSPIRED RESPONSE' from May 10 to 20. An ISPR (Navy) press release issued in Karachi on Sunday said that these exercises are a yearly feature meant to enhance interoperability between the two Naval Forces and improve security in maritime domain."

"EU Plans Summit To Help Strengthen Pakistan Government" "Dawn" (05/11)

"The European Union plans to hold the bloc's first ever summit with Pakistan in June to 'help strengthen the civilian government' there, an EU presidency source said."

Editorials/Op-eds

"U.S. Embassy Clarifies," a letter to the Editor by U.S. Charge d'Affaires, Feierstein, in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/10)

"Once again, we at the U.S. Embassy note untruthful and irresponsible reporting concerning the case of Dr. Aafia Siddiqui in a report titled "Saga of Aafia's unending torment in NY jail" (May 7). The truth is never served by sensationalism; we believe your readers, as fair-minded and critical thinkers, deserve better, and we are equally troubled by the complete failure on the part of your reporter to solicit comment from U.S. government sources...."

Grossly unsubstantiated allegations continue to be reported as 'fact'. Allegations that Dr. Siddiqui has been in custody at the Bagram Theatre Internment Facility in Afghanistan are completely erroneous. Ms Siddiqui was never in U.S. custody, either at the Bagram Theatre Internment Facility or elsewhere, prior to her detention by the Afghan police in Afghanistan on July 17, 2008. On July 18, 2008, she was wounded while attempting to kill US personnel who had come to interview her."

"Battle For Survival," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (05/11)

"There is no doubt that the latest military offensive against insurgents has been launched with greater public backing than the previous two actions conducted before the signing of the peace accord. But while tackling the growing insurgency, the government need not lose the focus of taking appropriate measures for the rehabilitation of the millions of internally displaced persons that has turned out to be a serious humanitarian crisis. The government should ensure proper management of resources, funds and manpower to make their stay in the camps as comfortable as possible. Donor agencies and foreign governments should also be approached to extend help."

"Military Operation And The Rehabilitation Of Affectees," an editorial in the center-right Urdu daily "Pakistan" (cir. 10,000) (05/11)

"Despite U.S. assistance, the government cannot support the large number of IDPs. In order to manage the refugee situation, all political and religious parties and the civil society need to show the same spirit they did in the wake of the 2005 earthquake.... As far as the Ulema and religious leaders are concerned, if they have the courage to play a role in reconciliation [between the government and TNSM/Taliban] they must do something practical and convince the Taliban to lay down their arms."

"Relief In Disarray," an editorial in the Peshawar-based, independent regional daily "The Frontier Post" (cir. 7,000) (05/11)

"A powerful action is needed quickly to make up on the neglect of caring for the displaced so far. Their exodus is mounting enormously with every passing day, having all the making of the biggest-ever populace of the internally displaced in the country. This would eventually turn into the worst-ever humanitarian calamity in our annals too if existing faltering relief action is not revamped and pepped up forthwith."

"We May Be Defeated By Refugee Camps," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English language daily "Daily Times" (cir. 10,000) (05/11)

"Unfortunately, Pakistan has once again been found standing dazed with its pants down before a population of refugees. The so-called 'national consensus' against the Taliban is not total, but it is quite broad and inclusive. The plight of the refugee camps will not only strengthen the Taliban, it will erode the national consensus too. No major politician has visited the refugee camps as they painfully come into existence."

"President Zardari And The Swat Operation: Strange Logic Of Not Feeling A Threat From India," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (05/11)

"Unfortunately, even the opposition, especially the PML-N is silent over U.S. demands, especially on not feeling any threat from India, and praise over withdrawal of troops from the eastern border. This means that the opposition too has accepted the U.S. concept of Indian supremacy. Meanwhile, the government is ready to accept all humiliating U.S. conditions for aid just to meet its expenses. Starting the Swat operation during President Zardari's presence in the U.S. is proof of this. In these circumstances, the parliament and the nation should exert pressure on the government not only to safeguard national interests but also the country's security and sovereignty."

"Responsibilities Of International Community, Government About IDPs

Of Malakand," an editorial in the popular rightist Urdu-language daily "Ausaf" (cir. 10,000) (05/11)

"The government will have to launch a global campaign to raise funds for the IDPs of Malakand Division and other adjoining areas. It must tell the U.S. and other countries that the present state of affairs owes to the Pakistan's position as the frontline state in the war on terror. Therefore, the international community is duty-bound to help Pakistan immediately instead of making sheer announcement."

"Rehabilitation Of IDPs Needs Attention Too," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (05/11)

"The government, NGOs and human rights institutions must all play their role in rehabilitation of the displaced persons. Are citizens being turned into refugees in their own homeland. If the military operation has not so far succeeded in establishing durable peace, what is the justification for continuing it?"

"Cabinet's Ratification Of The Swat Operation," an editorial in Lahore-based populist Urdu daily "Waqt" (cir. 10,000) (05/11)

"Now that the government has finally decided to conduct an operation in Swat and the Cabinet has ratified it also, the nation should also support the government fully so that it can achieve its target and the situation in the country improves. Simultaneously, the rehabilitation of displaced persons must be given full attention so that they can join the national mainstream and are once again able to work for the country's progress."

"Prime Minister's instructions on Security," Little Help more demands," an editorial in Hyderabad based liberal and independent daily "Kawish" (Cir. 105,000) (05/11)

"Following the Federal Cabinet's sanction for the military operation, the government needs to take the security situation very seriously, as usual raising the threat levels, and declaring high-alerts won't work. What is more important is that the people who are migrating from the conflict zone must be monitored vigilantly, so that terrorists may not sneak into other areas in the garb of IDPs to spread destruction there."

"Cabinet Endorses Military Operation In Malakand Division," an editorial in the Karachi-based center-right sensationalist Urdu daily "Ummat" (cir. 33,000) (05/11)

"Although the Federal Cabinet has approved the military operation in Malakand Division, one should not fail to remember the causes of this crisis that has its roots in the U.S. incursion into Afghanistan which resulted in massive destruction. This crisis is created by the U.S. that is an anti-Muslim and Islam power. Our enemies have been trying to instigate Pakistani people against their own army, create rift between Pakistani nation and its armed forces as that will make their job much easier."

"Religious Schools' Issue Should Be Get Resolved In Consultation With Scholars," an editorial in the leading mass circulation centrist Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (05/11)

"Some political circles believe that the President Zardari's remarks, particularly about taking the religious schools into the government's control are the upshot of the U.S. pressure.... As far as the reforms of the seminaries are concerned, no religious school has ever declined to do so, neither they ever opposed the idea. However, the government should take all schools of thoughts into confidence before introducing any reforms or changes in the syllabus to make them productive. And any government's move to enforce its one-sided and arbitrary agenda on seminaries will be unfortunate and counterproductive."

"Reports Of Taking Seminaries Into Government Control," an editorial in the Karachi-based, pro-Taliban Jihadi Urdu daily "Islam" (cir. 15,000) (05/11)

"Whenever Pakistani rulers visit the U.S., they always announce to accelerate the war against terrorism, and to take hold of the

religious schools. Any attempt to take the religious schools into the government's control on the pretext of uprising in the tribal areas and NWFP will be a folly. The religious schools have nothing to do with this unrest, and most of the self-styled Taliban have received education in modern contemporary schools."

"Madarassa Matters," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/11)

"The fact is that madressahs have proliferated because the public education system has collapsed.... In such circumstances, Madarassas which also offer shelter and meals, offer the only viable alternative for many families. Reforms must also be aimed at reviving public-sector education."

"Funding Terror," an editorial in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/11)

"Scant attention has thus far been paid to how the Taliban and some other extremist groups fund their operations. The 'traditional' picture is that there is a global network of informal funders and sympathizers, as well as at least two large state players in the Muslim world. Yet a picture is now emerging which tells a very different story as to how these groups get their money and sustain themselves - with three natural resources namely gemstones, timber and marble featuring strongly.... It is not possible to put a definitive figure on how much the Taliban are making from their excursion into economic activity, but the government estimates that it is losing 65 billion rupees annually from the illegal timber trade and indiscriminate deforestation alone. Not all of this will be going to the Taliban, but whatever they make from the gem and marble business, will. Once again, they have demonstrated an ability to adopt and adapt, to profit from the weaknesses of the civil administration and get the most out of the lands they now control. Underestimating their abilities is a mistake we all lose by."

"Afghan Transit Trade: It Is Against National Security," an editorial in the Peshawar-based Urdu-language daily "Mashriq" (cir. 55,000) (05/11)

"The U.S. that is determined to make India a regional policeman, wants to get access for India to the Central Asian Republics as well as Afghanistan via the Afghan Transit Trade. Keeping in view the 60 years track record of Pakistan-India relations, this Transit Trade is not consistent with the Pakistan's national security."

"Remembering The Ghosts Of May 12," an op-ed by Kamal Siddiqi in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/11)

"This is an unconventional war for which our army has neither experience nor training. That is why Mr. Mullen and his merry men are making frequent stopovers here - the need for help is dire. But do the Americans have something to teach us or are they too also clueless?... The American aid that we are being promised is a mixed blessing. It gives the government, known for its free spending ways, more money in the till.... In all this, we hope to see light at the end of the tunnel. But despite the optimism that our President seems to gush, it is a question of our government taking charge and responsibility."

"Are You With Us Or Against Us, Mr. Obama?," an op-ed by Talat Farooq in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/11)

"We are beginning to understand that both the American way of life and the Taliban value system are incompatible with our socio-cultural standards. The civil society of Pakistan must come forward and demand that our decision makers find home-grown solutions to indigenous issues instead of surrendering to either the rhetoric of the Americans or the blackmail of the Taliban. It is time to sift reality from mere perception and work toward a society that depicts the aspirations of the common men and women of Pakistan."

"The New U.S. Narrative," an op-ed by Ahmad Faruqi in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (05/11)

"There is the option of sending U.S. commandos into Pakistan. If the operation now being carried out by the Pakistani Army is successful, this option may remain on the backburner. However, given the serious tone of the comments coming from Washington, it would be naive to think that it will always stay there. The only way to stop the U.S. commandos from waging war on Pakistani soil is for the Pakistani Army to eliminate the militants."

"Military Operation In Swat," an op-ed by M. Ashraf Mirza in the Islamabad-based rightist English daily "Pakistan Observer" (cir. 5,000) (05/11)

"There is no reason for us to be overjoyed at the meager funds doled out to Pakistan during Mr. Zardari's visit to Washington. It's a peanut as compared to the losses suffered by it as a result of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and for what Pakistan has contributed towards the U.S. war on terror and has offered sacrifices in the process. Pakistan needs the military and economic tools to defeat the militants, whose elimination is the need of hour for not only the South Asian region, but for the whole world. It's, therefore, pertinent that the U.S. must meet all its requirements to achieve the desired results in the war on terror."

"Post-Operation Scenario," an op-ed by Anusha Ramzi in the Lahore-based liberal English daily "The Post" (cir. 5,000) (05/11)

"To express solidarity with the displaced persons, the NGOs, civil society organizations and political parties should send their delegations to visit the refugee camps. Right thinking Ulema should also visit those camps to tell the people that what militants are doing is against the teachings of Islam and inspire them to never bow down to the imposters who raise the banner of Islam to denigrate it through their barbaric methods, bullying, killing and maiming their Muslim brethren. Armed with the trust and confidence, these people in the camps would prove a great asset and in future they will stand up and fight the enemies of Pakistan and Islam."

"Talibanization & Identity Crisis," an op-ed by Huma Yusuf in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (05/11)

"Indeed, understanding the paralysis of civil society in the face of the Taliban onslaught lies at the heart of the identity crisis that Pakistan has faced since its inception. Many Pakistanis direct their outrage at the government.... For many, the government and the army's lack of vision in dealing with the Taliban has been the top complaint.... On the other hand, in some civic circles, the major concern is that the government and army have failed to protect basic human rights.... Worryingly, there are also those civil groups who are reluctant to have religious overtones cloud their anti-Taliban protests. But can you speak out against the Taliban without, at some level, speaking about religion? If complaints against the government, military and Taliban weren't enough, many Pakistanis are also organizing around the America factor. Cooperation with the U.S. in the war against terror has long been framed as a test of Pakistani sovereignty. As a result, Pakistanis are torn about what level of intervention they're willing to live with."

"Mobilizing The Nation," an op-ed by Talat Masood in the centrist national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (05/11)

"In counterinsurgency operations it is generally experienced that militants are spread out and fairly decentralized, can shift from one battlefield to another and can operate independently. Experience from different insurgencies has shown that in fighting militants we have to adapt to the changing dynamic and not remain fixated with traditional centralized command structures.... If we are clear that terrorism and militancy is our problem and we have to combat it then it is much easier to own the war and solicit the support of the people."

"Not A Failed State," an op-ed by Rifaat Hamid Ghani in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (05/11)

"Perhaps the most worrisome aspect of any crisis in Pakistan is the fact that the government does not inspire enough public confidence or even that much positive expectation.... At present we have a

failed government not a failed state. Rather than assume that we have exhausted our democratic political alternatives or permit civil/military fascism to become our execrable lot we need recourse to fresh elections. They are an expensive business. But the cost of civil disarray is higher."

Patterson